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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. AND CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS, 2005 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies centered their coverage March 11-13 on a major railway accident in Hualien; the KMT's victory in the Chiayi City legislative by-election Saturday; a KMT rally in Taipei Sunday to "Save Taiwan"; and the call for a new investigation into the 319 shooting incident, by the family of the man identified as the most likely would-be assassin. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, and the pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" both quoted Former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage March 11 as saying the United

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States is pleased with Taiwan's handling of the cessation of the National Unification Council (NUC) and National Unification Guidelines (NUG). The "Liberty Times," in the meantime, ran a banner headline on its front page March 13 that read: "Armitage: the International Community Is Concerned About Ma Ying-jeou's Anti-U.S. and Anti-Japan Stance." Several papers also reported on U.S. Pacific Commander Admiral William Fallon's remarks when testifying before the U.S. House Armed Services Committee Friday that the United States will remain committed to helping with Taiwan's defense.

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, journalist Sun Yang-ming said in the pro-unification "United Daily News" that Washington was actually very 'upset' with Taiwan's handling of the NUC and NUG matter because it suggested that the United States did not have as many bargaining chips as it had imagined when dealing with Taipei. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" questioned Washington's stance with regard to Chen's NUC announcement, calling Washington's response "strange at best and beguiling at worst." An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News," on the other hand, called on Washington to exercise its influence on Beijing to press China to engage in dialogue with the Taiwan government. With regard to the State Department's 2005 Human Rights report, an editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" called the report highly valuable as "it speaks authoritatively about Taiwan while standing outside the partisan muddying that can overwhelm local human rights discourse." End summary.

13. U.S. and Cross-Strait Relations

A) "How Is the United States Going to Placate Beijing?"

Journalist Sun Yang-ming said in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (3/12):

"The departure of former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard

Armitage from Taiwan can be viewed as a dividing line that marked the ending of the first stage and the beginning of the second stage with regard to the Bush administration's [handling] of Chen Shui-bian's 'cessation of the National Unification Council and its guidelines. ...'

"[Is there the] question as to why the United States dropped this matter for the time being? Judging from the United States' performance so far, Washington was actually very 'upset' because [it suggested that] the United States did not have as many bargaining chips as it had imagined [it had in dealing with Taipei]. Should Washington make a slight move [against Chen], Chen would not care at all; but the United States does not feel like dealing a heavy blow to Chen either. Besides, once it deals a heavy blow [to Chen], Beijing may likely misinterpret it as meaning that Washington has given up on Taiwan, and believe that it could use this opportunity to exploit [Taiwan]. ... The other part that Washington has to deal with [now] is to placate Beijing and to discuss with it the next step they should take with regard to the Taiwan issue. ...

"... Washington is almost sure that Chen's future constitutional reform plan will have a bigger impact on the cross-Straits situation. The best plan Washington has in mind is to place its hope on the pan-Blue camp, hoping that it could block the DPP's draft version of the new constitution in the Legislative Yuan. But no matter what, the United States is very concerned about the uncertainties ... on cross-Straits relations and on triangular interactions between Washington, Beijing and Taipei."

B) "Status Quo: Unchanged or Not?"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/11):

"The controversy over whether President Chen Shui-bian has abolished the National Unification Council and terminated the National Unification Guidelines boils down to one question: Does the NUC still exist? ... Why equivocating? Because to Washington, scrapping or abolishing the NUC is a breach of commitment and a unilateral alteration of the status quo, to which the United States objects. ...

"But is Washington's objection for real or just for show? It was surprising to see that right after President Chen made his bombshell announcement on Feb. 27, Washington said Chen's announcement did not alter Taiwan's status quo. But after mainland leader Hu Jintao gave his stern warning, the U.S. State Department demanded Chen Shui-bian to 'publicly acknowledge for the record that the Feb. 27 announcement did not abolish the NUC, did not change the status quo.'

"Washington's response to Chen's bold move is strange at best and beguiling at worst. The U.S. acted like a willing co-player of Chen's word game, in which Washington pretends that it's business as usual because Chen assures that the NUC is not 'abolished.' With so many China hands and sinologists at its disposal, Washington should know what 'cessation' means in Chinese in the context of this momentous matter."

C) "More Dialogue Best for U.S.-Taiwan Ties"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (3/13):

"Given Armitage's status as a formerly influential high-ranking official who used to be in charge of Asian affairs and cross-strait affairs, a more constructive way to judge his visit should be focused on what he did for Taiwan during his term as deputy secretary of state and how he suggested calming down the current

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tactical tension in the U.S.-Taiwan relationship. ...

"Clearly, the intent [of Washington] is to urge President Chen to avoid any complacency over the winding down of the NUC and related guidelines and to assure the Bush administration that there will be no more 'surprises' that could 'jeopardize' the mutual trust between

Taipei and Washington. Such a request is not unreasonable. But in return, we hope that Washington can exercise its influence to press Beijing to engage in dialogue with Taiwan's democratically-elected government and respect the right of free choice of our 23 million people."

4. 2005 Human Rights Report

"State Department Is Right on Rights"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] said in an editorial (3/11):

"This year's US State Department country report on human rights in Taiwan is, as always, very welcome. ... The report made no mention, however, of the falling number of executions, nor the failure of the Chen administration to eradicate the death penalty entirely. By world standards, however, this is hardly a dramatic development. ...

"Overall, however, the government can find comfort in a positive assessment of its efforts to maintain and improve the human rights environment. The state Department's report is of considerable value because it speaks authoritatively about Taiwan while standing outside the partisan muddying that can overwhelm local human rights discourse. Indeed, compared with the lack of enthusiasm that many in the State Department feel toward Taiwan in general, the report is like a bouquet: It embraces Taiwanese and foreigners here as human beings worthy of respect and protection. And because politicians on both sides are loath to openly denigrate the US for daring to pass judgment on their country (a comparison with China on this point is irresistible), the report obtains an unusual credibility. ... It is hoped that the measured criticisms in this report can energize those who aim to craft a more stable, just and dignified nation."

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